

# The Spiritual Significance of Slowing Down

By Mas Vidal



Most people would equate the concept of slowing down with getting old, being lazy or retiring. However, slowing down has great spiritual significance that becomes an entry point for the expansion of consciousness. Slowing down means that our spiritual rituals are no longer mechanical exercises and can actually become practices that benefit our awareness with an ever-deepening stillness and concentration.

There is a great story told about life that, when we are born, we (the baby) exits the womb and enters the world in tears, weeping, screaming and yelling “oh no! Not again...why am I here again, the baby exclaims? I didn’t want to come back to this crazy and painful world again.” While those standing around the baby celebrate in joy about the new member of the family. Then when we prepare to exit the world and discard the body, we are often quiet, reserved and even joyful, while those around us are in tears. It's an interesting paradox that we see in life because we have forgotten our true nature and have become fooled to think this world is our permanent home. Attachment to humans is the strongest of all, but somehow when we surrender to the Divine hand we feel at peace that there is something more beyond the events of this life.

Slowing down can be defined as an aspect of simple living. The common slogan of most people today is, “I’m busy” and much of our lives are consumed with the business of trying to earn more and more money with the idea that at some point everything will be easy because there is enough money to buy whatever we need, work less, enjoy life and travel. But does this really define evolution? The term business comes from “busy” or to be occupied. I like to stay that keeping busy is really more about staying pre-occupied because when there is a lack of self-worth, how we evaluate ourselves is based on our level of busy-ness and when we are busy the mind stays active without ever contemplating the nature of our existence or the purpose of life. This brings up my next point, our times are challenged with a lack of purpose, a real myth to live by. Our societies, in general, have no myths, stories or rituals to live by. I meet so many people today that have returned to work after retirement because they had nothing better to do and are simply escaping boredom. The concept of purpose that is driven into our minds by society and the media is work, career, house and attaining the material items that everyone is supposed to have to live a fulfilling life. This is another deceptive feature of the ego and the conspiracy of material societies.

The practice of Ayurvedic self-care (svastta vritta) principles is one aspect of creating an integral mind-body relationship that increases harmony and produces a calming quality in our disposition. When we are in harmony with our body it naturally increases our connection to the earth and all natural things. Another example is eating a plant-based diet, which increases our spiritual sensitivities and can lead to the practice of sacred yogic techniques. I have a friend who was a major meat eater for much of his life and around the age of 50, for health reasons related to inflammation in his joints that were almost disabling him from enjoying his physical activities, he switched to a plant-based diet. In a matter of weeks he was feeling better and after a month or so he was able to return to his yoga practice and other outdoor activities he thoroughly enjoyed. More importantly than this is the psychological shift that occurred. He noticed he was calmer, slept better and interesting enough began to explore spiritual teachings. Ayurvedic wellness is integrative and works on multiple levels to heal the fragmentation of mind and body, which in turn kindles the soft light of awareness, compassion, and sensitivity. In yoga, this is an awakening of the moon's energy. Generally speaking, our consciousness has become so much dominated by the sun it is burning up many aspects of our life. The sun is wonderful to enjoy but we all know that with overexposure it becomes tiring and overbearing and damaging to our health. This is a metaphor for the lives of many today that, live a life of overexposure, outbound and exhausted from repeatedly searching for fulfillment in names and forms. The energy of Ayurveda is about awakening and inviting the energy of the moon into our lives to nurture the mind and body and our relationship with nature.

Yoga, alternatively, is working on the mental device of shifting our consciousness beyond the dull (mudha) and distracting (kshipta) aspects of the ego mind and aims to awaken the higher mind, one that leads us to attain great discrimination and eventually affords us much time. I consider yoga to be a system of becoming more efficient because as mental harmony increases, the chakras, (subtle energy centers in the spine) and the elements (earth-water-fire-air-ether) expand to increase our awareness, leading to greater levels of concentration. The greatest obstacle to practical efficiency and human evolution is a lack of concentration. A restless mind produces anxiety and many other emotional imbalances that can lead to making very detrimental choices in life. Control over the mind is the secret to success.

When we are too busy with life's complexities we often lose sight of the real purpose of life, to evolve and grow our loving relationship with God as we discover His presence in all living things. The great Sage Adi Shankaracharya once said there are three things in life that are the most difficult to attain. The first is to be embodied as a human being because being embodied as a human being gives the soul great opportunity for attaining liberation while in animals self-effort towards liberation is minimal. The second is to have an aspiration for liberation or happiness (mumukshutwa). When we have suffered enough and questioned the capacity the material world has for giving us true happiness this becomes a significant indicator that we want real freedom and something more enduring that no one can take away from us. To have that yearning for spiritual freedom is rare and very few souls aspire towards this. Even out of the millions doing fitness-based yoga, only small few want to open their heart, change their lifestyle and grow in their love for God.

The third is to come into contact with a real Sage, a guru or spiritual preceptor that can teach one the path that leads to liberation. To come into contact with such a being is to also be in relationship with a lineage that disseminates the eternal wisdom of the cosmos. These three might be the greatest blessings anyone can attain in life because they lead to true happiness and the bliss of the soul.

If we are losing our health we need to do something about it and this means to not only repair the body but to change what is causing the disorder. If we are not happy or content then we must dedicate more time to inner reflection, improve our associations and slow down with the medicine of being in nature. Going for a long walk in nature is one of the most relaxing things anyone can do. If we want to be spiritual, happy and balanced we must create an environment that reflects those virtues.

Any time of the year is a good time to do a clearing of the people, places, and things that no longer serve us. Spring or Fall are ideal times to do a healing detox and reduce vata dosha (air) as taught in Ayurveda. The massage of medicinal herbal oils on the body is extremely calming and relaxing, in addition to cooking and gardening, both of which are actually quite rare these days. Much of what is eaten today is purchased in a package and thus it removes us from the task of cooking instead of engaging the mind to prepare the food to ingest it in the body. These tasks are like meditations that I often say are an important part of living a healthy and fulfilling life. Paying others to do everything for us may make life easier in one aspect, but it dampens the will and speeds up the pace of life and perpetuates a habit that breeds greater and greater expectations. Slowing down means to be practical and to take initiative towards getting things accomplished, one thing at a time. When we are practical and learn to do things ourselves we embrace the fact that things take time and energy to accomplish, which leads us to feel less entitled and reduces our expectations of others. When we begin to use our energy to help others even in the form of small favors it builds an appreciation for life and our relationships, this is one of the gifts of slowing down and being in the moment. How few today have even a little time to help a friend or a family member. The world is so caught up in work for money (currency) they are losing perspective of a much higher thing, evolution. When the mind is overly focused on attaining currency (\$), we must stop and ask our selves, "what direction is my life flowing?" I want to end this essay with a great quote by the great Ramakrishna (Bengali yogi) that I think says much about slowing down.

*"When the flower blooms, the bees come uninvited.*

*God is in all men, but all men are not in God; that is why we suffer.*

*The winds of grace are always blowing, but you have to raise the sail.*

*If you must be mad, be it not for the things of the world. Be mad with the love of God.*

*Many good sayings are to be found in holy books, but merely reading them will not make one religious.*

*It is easy to talk on religion, but difficult to practice it.*

*When the divine vision is attained, all appear equal; and there remains no distinction of good and bad, or of high and low.*

*Pray to God that your attachment to such transitory things as wealth, name, and creature comforts may become less and less every day.*

*One must be very particular about telling the truth. Through truth one can realize God. Work, apart from devotion or love of God, is helpless and cannot stand alone."*

